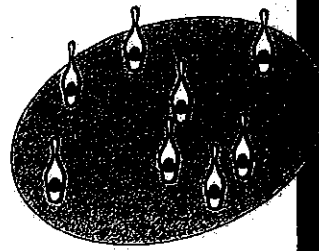


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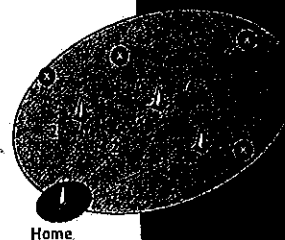
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Game Sense Cards

30 games to develop
thinking players

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Game Sense: an introduction

'When are we going to play a game?' This question is usually one of the first that children ask at the start of any skills training session. And while the time invested in drills pays off when a game is started, there is more than likely going to be two elements missing from the skills-drills-game cycle ... *game sense* and *fun*.

We often see children in team sports following the play around in a pack. Their skills in delivering the ball from one player to another may well be excellent, but scoring opportunities will be limited by this 'pack approach'. If just one player thought about tactics and stood away from the pack waiting for a loose ball or a pass, it would provide a greater opportunity to score. That player would have game sense.

As coaches and teachers we have a responsibility to ensure that children's learning and development is fun and enjoyable as well as complete. Imagine the satisfaction of a child using newly acquired strategies to experience the joy of scoring that first goal or making that first tackle.

Game sense can be learned. While there is obviously an important place for technical coaching and skill development, the Game Sense method encourages children to use their basic skills as well as develop strategies or tactics themselves.

Game Sense makes a game the focus of a practice session rather than technique. It challenges the players to think about what they are actually doing and why. And the coach/teacher becomes a facilitator, setting tasks to be solved and creating situations where players take on the responsibility of finding solutions for themselves.

Coaches, teachers and others working with children can use this resource to help implement effective coaching programs. Coaches or teachers can ask questions about the games and this becomes a key aspect in promoting a 'thinking' approach in players.

Why use Game Sense?

The Game Sense approach aims to:

- present a more realistic view of what games are about, ie teamwork, communication, decision making, rules, etc rather than technical skills in isolation
- allow the coach/teacher to take on the role of facilitator so that players take more responsibility for their own development and learning
- develop thinking players who can solve problems that arise in a game situation through tactical awareness and understanding
- promote an enjoyable, safe and challenging environment for all participants
- cater for variations in players' abilities.

A typical Game Sense session

- 1 Warm-up
- 2 Introduce a simple but challenging game
- 3 Observe players and assess play
- 4 Stop the game or individual players to ask questions, for example
 - when you are trying to score a goal, what are some clever ways of dodging a defender?
 - when you pass a ball, what makes it easy for your opponent to intercept? How could you avoid that happening?
- 5 Allow time for team discussion and practise to find solutions
- 6 Return to game — re-evaluate players' responses. Repeat steps 4 and 5 as necessary and add additional challenges as the game progresses
- 7 Warm down at the end of the session

Progression of games — some hints

Games are divided into four categories — target games, net/wall games, striking/fielding games and invasion games. Each category is particularly suitable for specific types of sport and these are clearly identified at the top of each game card.

The principle of moving from simple challenges in games to progressively more complex ones should be followed. Examples of how this can be done include:

- use games from the target category first, followed by net/wall, striking/fielding, and finally invasion games
- progress from a relatively structured session to a more open one — for example
 - few rules —————> many rules
 - one opponent —————> more than one
 - one team mate —————> more than one
 - separate court areas —————> shared space
 - stationary targets —————> moving targets
 - one simple movement —————> movements in combinations
- use games that allow ample time for players to make decisions early in the coaching session, eg 1-on-1 tag
- progress to games that reduce the time available to react, eg a game of 3 on 3
- when first introducing a tactical problem, ensure the players use techniques they can easily control (eg underarm throw), or offer them some options to choose from — progress to more difficult techniques when the tactical problem has been solved.

Game Sense offers players and coaches a different approach to developing the decision-making skills necessary to play a variety of sports successfully. It shifts the emphasis from an assumption that once a technique is acquired, applying it to a game automatically happens. Game Sense allows technique and skills to be developed in an enjoyable environment. After skills are developed, more advanced techniques can be introduced to individuals to improve their performance further.

Game Sense is an approach that can be used for players of all abilities, and by coaches and teachers of varying levels of experience. The approach takes practice but it is worth the effort.